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CAPTIVE OF THE KAISER IN BELGIUM

(WITH THE FALL OF NAMUR)

By

GEORGES LA BARRE

Fronchapelles 26./8. 1914.

George
Es wird gebeten, Herrn La Barre,
Kriegskorrespondent der Graphic,
Galegnenfeld in Sedan, eine Klaffe
Karte nach Holland in Galegnenfeld.

V. A.
Journaleurem im Generalstab
des Generalstabs.



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BELGIUM

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GEORGES LA BARRE.

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GEORGES LA BARRE

WITH SEVEN SKETCHES BY
THE AUTHOR

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<p> FRONTISPIECE MAP OF NAMUR AND DISTRICT BONINNE MASS THE CELLAR THE BARN THE BOMBARDMENT OF NAMUR (By permission of <i>The Graphic</i>) FROIDCHAPELLE FUGITIVES </p>	<p> <i>Frontispiece</i> TO FACE PAGE 9 33 33 48 48 64 81 81 </p>
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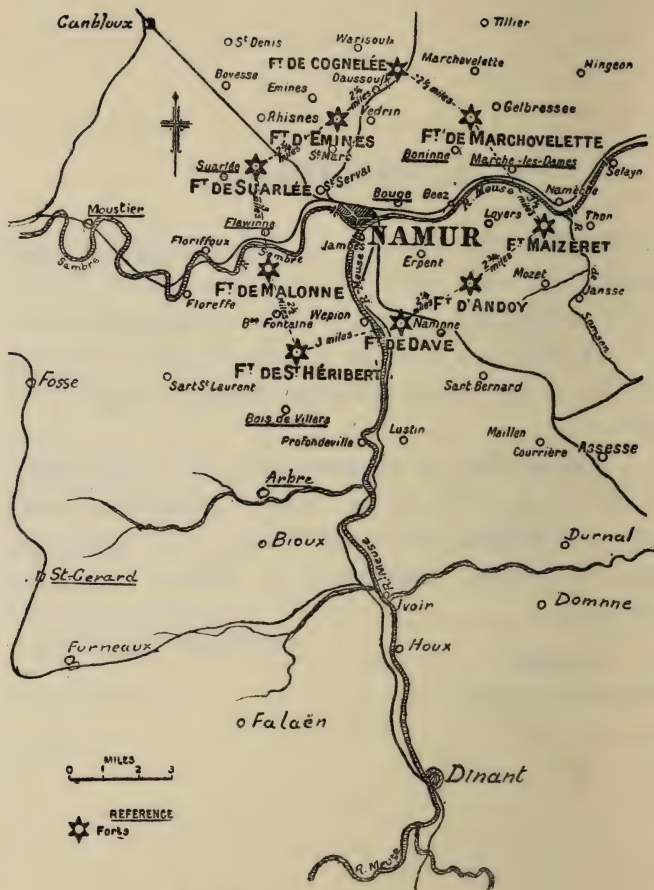
PREFACE

IN the following pages I have tried to give a plain account of all I observed during a crowded fortnight in Belgium, and to keep strictly to the truth. I have made no attempt to give technical military details or to attain to any literary elegance of style.

I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. P. G. Wilson, of Owen's School, Islington, who has helped me in many ways with the book, and to whose suggestion it, indeed, owes its existence.

GEORGES LA BARRE.

LONDON,
September 24, 1914.



MAP OF NAMUR AND DISTRICT.
Places mentioned in this book are underlined.

CAPTIVE OF THE KAISER IN BELGIUM

CHAPTER I

I START FOR THE FRONT

THE hot sun pours its beams on the quiet canals of the city of Amsterdam. On either side, in the shade of the trees, people are leisurely going about their business, the sunlit streak of water between hardly disturbed by the passing of the heavy barge, its mast and ropes lying along the deck, the wherry behind nosing along like a dog following its master. The owner, who is also the captain and the crew, walks to the wide-breasted prow, dragging his long pole behind him, swings it round horizontally, and with one movement of the arm drops it without a splash deep into the mud below, leaning his weight on the pole as the boat moves on under him, till, reaching his wife, holding the heavy tiller, her white cap gleaming in the sun, he exchanges a nod with the little blond heads popping out of the cabin, and returns to his

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patient walk. The barge creeps into the shadows of the bridge, leaving the water lazily rippling, the reflections forming a snake-like pattern of the cream-painted windows of the patrician houses lining the canal.

Still, heavy peace brooded on the city. I had been walking round, carrying a heavy paintbox, looking for some corner which would epitomize these impressions, and was returning weary of the struggle of fixing them in some pictorial form, when, on turning a corner into some busy street, I saw a crowd staring at a paper posted in a tobacconist's window. What is it? "Mobilization Order, August 1st, 1914. 'The Queen, in pursuance of the Acts, . . . has this day signed the order of General Mobilization. All men not at present under the colours to report themselves.' "

War ! It had come ! Previous to my taking up the career of an artist, I had been an assiduous reader of the papers, taking a great interest in the diplomatic moves and the arming of the great nations, and I had fully come to the conclusion that when war broke out it would involve the whole of Europe in the cataclysm. Many times since, on picking up a foreign paper I had thrown it down on reading between the lines the signs of the very threatening black cloud ahead. The paltry assassination of a prince, followed by his

country's demands for reparation, the refusal of some details made by a small nation on the outskirts of civilization, and an excuse was found for the long-pent-up jealousy of material advantages to be put to the test of blood and iron : the throng of poets, artists, dramatists, composers, and philosophers whose lives had been sacrificed to our spiritual needs, the doctors, pioneers, and inventors who had worked for our physical welfare, the glory and pride of the nations, all in a moment swept aside to make way for the inventors of engines of death, the cool brains to handle them, the swarming hosts sowing death and trampling down the harvests of peace ! I stared with despair at my canvases, the work of years of trying to express in line, rhythm of colour and atmosphere the sentiment and beauty of life, all turning under my eyes into earthy smears, meaningless in the hot, destructive blast of war.

Going to my neighbour's studio, I found him overhauling a litter of boots, socks, knapsacks, amongst which one could see his carbine ominously sticking out. He was swearing in good round Dutch because all that it would probably mean for him, a bombardier, would be, as he thought, to be shut up in a fortress, eating weevily biscuits. Another artist, his long legs stretched on a divan, was looking on with a superior smile. " Let

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them all fight," said he ; " there will be more room to breathe." Then followed a long argument, my idealistic friend concluding by saying he would go into the country and paint dewy sunrises far from the rumble of the cannon. My opposing argument that one must live it warmed me up and decided me to write to two illustrated papers offering my services for the front.

That evening ten thousand Social Democrats met in the park to protest against the war, and returned, pleased with themselves, singing socialistic hymns—a straw trying to dam an avalanche ! The next morning troops marched out of the town ; as they swung by one was struck by the lack of enthusiasm displayed by them. In fact, the only expression one heard was a Dutch one which means " a rotten state of things." The Dutch, even the proletariat, are an enlightened people ; they showed their disgust that such a position could be possible, and that they had probably to be dragged into a struggle without interest to them. The mobilization caught them at a time when the common blue uniform was being changed into a grey one, similar to the German, and probably due to the influence of the German Prince Consort. One saw a grey coat and blue trousers, or a blue tunic with a grey forage cap, but all wore the same lugubrious expression. Very few of their womenfolk saw them

off. I saw only one woman that early morning with her two children. As the troops swung round she said, "There goes your daddy!" biting her lips and forcing back her tears.

Gradually during the next few days that ensued the people settled down to waiting for the bulletins, and with the example of the Belgian invasion and the resistance of Liège, they realized their position. They dared not express a word of their fear that their neutrality might be invaded either by the Germans making a short cut across South Limburg, or that the English might demand the passage of the Scheldt into Antwerp. Not a flag was shown, not a word was said in the newspapers of the possible eventualities. The feelings of the Amsterdamers were more anti-German than anti-British, their commerce being largely invaded by the "Moffs" as they slightly call the Germans, fifty thousand of whom form part of the inhabitants. Meanwhile coin got scarce; in the poorer quarters a run was made on the grocers, and owing to the stoppage of exports, butter, cheese, potatoes, and pork dropped in price. My impatience growing at the inaction forced upon me, I offered myself as interpreter between English and Belgian troops, but was discouraged from doing so by the Belgian Minister at the Hague, who said that there were no signs that the British would enter Belgium.

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On returning home, to my great joy I opened a letter from the *Graphic*, authorizing me to go out. I rushed off to the Consulate, the necessary passports and declarations were prepared, and I proceeded to buy my kit. Germans expelled from Antwerp spread the tale of the spy panic in Belgium, asserting that suspicious persons were lynched without the chance of a trial. I therefore out-Englished the English by dressing in light tweeds and puttees. As a matter of fact, my English appearance served me in good stead at times, though at others it was to my detriment, for it made me too conspicuous, as the sequel will show. I took one of the few trains going to Rotterdam, on the way passing Dutch troops making preparations to defend their country. The Dutch have a unique defence in their so-called "water-line," a ribbon of low-lying country (called *polderland*, or land reclaimed from the sea) about ten miles broad, criss-crossed by canals, lakes, and ditches. This stretches from the fortified town of Naarden on the Zuider Zee to the Maas in the south, and can be instantly flooded by opening sluices at different points. The water is only allowed to lie six inches above the roads and canals, thus effectually disguising the routes whilst making it impossible to cross by means of boats. The main roads not submerged can be

swept by the island-like forts. This is only used as a last resort, the silt from the brackish water damaging the land, but this move protects the east side of Holland, the Netherlands proper, which is the most valuable part of the country, the east side being mostly heathland. The notices warning farmers to build their ricks high and dry above the water-line showed that it was the Government's firm intention to make use of these desperate means of resisting the invader. Woods and houses in the line of the fort fire were also cut down.

After sleeping in Rotterdam, the next morning I crossed the Belgian frontier, the only incident being a gendarme belonging to the *douane* carefully nosing my untouched drawing blocks. The change from undemonstrative Holland to a patriotic people on the alert was soon shown. From all the churches and houses, and in the buttonhole of every man the Belgian colours of red-yellow-black were proudly displayed. When I arrived at Brussels early on Sunday, August 16th, the clean little city was one fire of enthusiasm, the streets a long lane of flags. Hawkers everywhere were selling little buttonholes of the colours of the Allies, swarms of girls were invading the cafés rattling Red Cross boxes in one's ear, and they were never refused. Pride in the

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doings at Liège and in their young King showed in every face. Motors with an "S. M." (*Service Militaire*) painted on the sides roared up the boulevards, boy scouts on bicycles flew through the traffic bearing dispatches. I was shown large shops owned by Germans that had been smashed in by the populace ; some bearing doubtful Teuton names were painted out, notices being displayed informing the public that the management and staff were entirely composed of Belgians. Other large stores, more far-seeing, had already converted some of their floors into Red Cross hospitals, the glass of their display windows being dis-tempered and bearing a large red cross. The roofs of the hospitals and palaces had huge red crosses painted on their sides as a protection from aircraft. The square in front of the Gare du Nord was one black mass of people patiently waiting to greet with cheers the arrival of the wounded from the front.

Whilst eating my supper I made the acquaintance of an American reporter whose one refrain was, "I want to get on." He was seemingly unaware that he was somewhat hampered by his French being limited to the words "pom-di-taire" and "journaliste Amurricain"! The next two days were occupied in one long round from one Ministry to some other official department across the city,

all the first approaches to which were strictly guarded by tall boy scouts. At the Ministry of War I caught a glimpse of the first English officers, smart men in blue uniforms. After being passed from official to official, I was sent to the Commandant, where the same thing occurred. Here I saw a little Lancashire lad of about twenty with a camera, all at sea amongst the rushing officials and gendarmes ; he carried a typewritten letter from some local paper in his hand, and was trying to get a permit to go and photograph the scene of action. At length I found a friend in the Service Militaire who put me on the right track and rushed me along boulevards in his motor, finally landing me in the courtyard of a gendarmerie where a rubicund officer went through my papers, and after humorously cutting off the superfluous parts of my photograph, pasted it on a slip of paper bearing the words, "Laissez passer." In the streets the Bruxellois greeted one with smiles, exclaiming, "C'est un Anglais," which I found to be the best of passports. That evening I met a Dutch journalist who in times of peace is a chansonnier of repute ; he had, together with an English confrère, secured one of the few remaining cars, and kindly offered to take me as a passenger on the following day.

At six the next morning we started for the front

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in the direction of Louvain. On the outskirts of Brussels we passed trenches guarded by "gardes civiques," their stout forms encased in black uniforms, with the old-fashioned bowler-hats, decorated with the Belgian colours—a head-gear that gave them the true appearance of a Yeoman Guard. They were eventually disarmed before Brussels was taken, the Germans refusing to recognize them as military. The trenches were never used. In the country we were stopped by the rural guard, the uniform now being a cockade on the hat and blouse, and the arms a fowling-piece. Speeding along, the fields on either side full of stooks of corn, we passed the ominous sign of a battery, with ammunition-wagons, resting behind a farmhouse, and so reached the top of a hill. Ill-fated Louvain was lying beneath us, its spires pointing out of the morning mists, the dispelling sun playing on its glistening roofs.

On running into the town we found its streets crowded with the populace; in the square in front of the station weary infantry were reforming preparatory to retreating on Brussels. Outside the town on the road to Tirlemont the first sign of business we saw was a "garde civique," lying behind a small mound of earth, nervously waiting for the outposts of the enemy. We decided to leave the car, ordering it to be

turned round, and walked along the road in the direction of the enemy. We met great wagons, full of household goods, the women perched on top laughing to see "those English going the other way," as they said. There kept coming up stragglers from the Belgian army, telling us the Uhlans were behind and might appear at any moment over the rise of the road which we saw before us. We gathered from them that they had fought the whole night on this side of Tirlemont, which was in flames, and indeed we saw the smoke going up along the horizon.

Our informant remarked: "We had to retire, as the Germans fell in on us in the trenches like sacks of flour in such numbers that we could not get out." Our more experienced war correspondent opining that it was bad policy to remain in the rear of a retiring army, we made our way back to the car. The station was now one seething mass of refugees and wounded soldiers, vainly trying to get the last train out of the doomed town. We then returned to Malines, passing miles of ammunition-wagons and guns, their smashed sides and gashed horses showing they had been in action. They were evidently going to reform before Malines on the line of retreat to Antwerp. Turning off at a side road, we regained Brussels, and after writing up our news and lunch-

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ing we set off again, with Namur as our destination. We passed the Lion on the Mound at Waterloo, staring down towards France, our erstwhile enemy. We were continually stopped by the peasant guard in every village on the road until we reached historic Quatre-Bras. Wishing to reconnoitre the plains of Waterloo with a view to a possible battle there, I left the car and said good-bye.

Women were gathering in the oats from the fields, their one and only question being, "Will the Germans pass this way?" The people have no idea of either the numbers of men involved or of the ground covered by fighting troops. They seemed quite satisfied if "they" only passed through the distant town. I walked to a little railway-station in the fields, where I was told I should not be able to reach Namur. I went on, however, the country changing from the sunny fields of corn to heaps of slag, criss-crossed by overhead hanging railways, along which crept little trucks of coal. The Walloon people in these parts—the Black Country of Belgium—were very suspicious. The workmen in the train looked askance at me, and started to talk about German spies dressed as Englishmen. I got interested in their conversation, but one of them remarked, with a surly scowl, "Yes, you

can look at me ! ” meaning no doubt that he was well aware that I was a spy and he was not afraid of me. On getting out of the train at a junction I was accosted by an officer of the gendarmerie, who asked to see my papers, the crowd standing around in great expectation. Being satisfied, he told me I might proceed, with a sort of expression meaning “ but don’t do it again.” I spoke to some French soldiers standing on the platform, and their quiet determination was good to see.

The question most often asked me was, “ Where are the English? ” The secret had been well kept, for no one in Belgium had any idea where they were. As I could not proceed farther than Moustier, three stations from Namur, I descended ; my papers were again examined at the same time as they took my ticket. I had hardly left the station and was trying to catch up a “ garde civique ” to ask the direction to the house of a friend who I remembered lived in the town, when I heard cries from all sides ; I turned round and saw a young man running at me disengaging his revolver. My papers, however, satisfied him, and I went on to my friend’s house, where I found the maid, who said she was expecting the family back from a walk. I saw she was too suspicious to let me in, so, being tired, sat down and waited.

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Presently, out of the corner of my eye, I perceived two gendarmes running at me, their rifles ready in their hands. The maid nervously remarked, "You will see, monsieur, they will come to you." By this time I had got used to this, and went on quietly smoking my pipe till they reached me, all out of breath.

"Your papers!" I produced them, but the stamp of the Ministry of War was not sufficient for them. I must go to the gendarmerie. I said I hoped it would not be far, but they marched me off between them with their rifles at the ready. They seemed to me to be frightened at the mere idea that they might have to use them! At the gendarmerie more armed men sprang out from behind doors. "That's him!" I heard from all sides. In the office they crowded in, but only stared at me, so, being tired, I sat down on a table, littered with papers. This brought them back to their senses sufficiently for one of them to offer me a chair. After carefully re-examining my papers, their chief seemed satisfied, but warned me not to remain on the roads, as one of the village guards *pourrait me jouer une farce*, which I understood to mean might shoot and then inquire afterwards! On arriving at my friend's I was told that this was quite true; he had seen forty suspects arrested in two hours at Charleroi. Some

were dressed as ladies, some as priests, while one was even got up as a nurse with a doll in a perambulator ! My friend's maid, poor girl ! was quite ill after seeing me taken off by the police.

That morning, the 19th, French infantry, cavalry, and guns passed in one continuous stream over the Sambre to the delirious acclamations of the populace. After supper we discussed the atrocities of the Germans, which, they affirmed, were only too true. The next morning two German aeroplanes flew successively over our heads, causing the children to run about the garden screaming, "C'est un Alboche !" while rifles ineffectively cracked about the village. We heard that one had dropped a bomb with the intention of blowing up the arsenal.

The son of the house, a bright little boy of twelve, kept bringing me news from the village; for him every sound he heard was so many more "Alboches" killed. A picture of peace was the old grandmother, eighty-eight years of age, who, with a strong reading-glass and a prayer-book held up near her face, was trying to make out the words of a prayer, a crucifix at her elbow. My host, who owned a large chemical works, was anxious to get his family to a place of safety, but was hampered by the fear of leaving his works and the old grandmother, who could not be moved. The rumours of

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the atrocities committed by the Germans made the parents cruelly anxious about their children; the father had a loaded revolver in a cupboard, which, after I left them and had had more experience of the German way of dealing with people found with arms, made me very uneasy as to their fate.

Bidding the family good-bye, I was escorted to the station by my friend, when an incident took place which showed the highly strung state of the population. A Belgian soldier was relating to the crowd of passengers his experiences, and saying that they were betrayed by their own officers; on hearing this my friend, who is a Frenchman by birth and very quick, soundly rated him for speaking in such a manner about his superiors to a mixed crowd, and told him he would have to be careful. A lady standing by burst into tears, and remonstrated with my friend for what she called his rough treatment of a soldier. He raised his hat, remarking, "Madame, you are a woman, and I cannot discuss the matter with you." The soldier then came up and admitted his mistake, and they shook hands all round.

I found I was the only passenger, when farther on we penetrated the encircling belt of forts guarding Namur. I had an opportunity of admiring the supplementary defence works in the interval between Forts Suarlée and Malonne. Here in a

valley the River Sambre flowed on to join the Meuse at Namur, the railway line from Charleroi being continuous with it. The village of Flawinne was built house upon house on the slope of the hill; the sides of the houses facing down the valley were loopholed, whilst in the gardens overlooking the roofs were dug wide trenches covered with railway sleepers and earth defending the hill. In front of this valley was one confused network of barbed-wire entanglements, the ground in many places being mined. This would have been a terrible place for an army to attack, and would have cost thousands of lives, but unfortunately events showed that the Germans refused to throw their men away on these fine defences, but made a wide detour in order to avoid them. I arrived at length in the empty station of Namur, a great patch of daylight coming in through a hole in the smoke-grimed glass roof, showing where a German aeroplane had dropped a bomb a few days previously. The damage done was unimportant as the bomb struck a girder and so only smashed some glass; if, however, it had fallen through into the station the carnage would have been awful, as a regiment was just detraining. My papers having been examined and stamped by the Commandant, I was free to go about the town.

CHAPTER II

THE FALL OF NAMUR

A WALK round revealed to me the natural beauties of this Belgian Sheffield, a Sheffield only in the sense that it is famed for its cutlery ware, for it is, unlike its English sister town, a clean little place and delightfully picturesque. All round rise wooded hills, gently sloping down to the banks of the Meuse, with here and there a bluff chalk rock standing out, and outside the hills lie the forts. The Meuse, which is here about the breadth of the Thames at Kew, flows up from the south and turns at right angles to the east, its waters being kept navigable by means of locks and sluices. The Sambre, coming from the west, and about half the breadth of the Meuse, joins that river where it bends round into the town. Between the angle formed by these two rivers a great mass of rocks overhangs the town, crowned by an old disused fortress known as the Citadel. The old ramparts of this former stronghold form a pleasant promenade

for the good folk of Namur, where they parade on Sundays after church. The town itself is a network of busy streets of clean, white-painted houses opening into the square in front of the station, opposite which stand the principal hotels.

I walked round to the Pont de Salzinnes, which crosses the Sambre, and saw the hole made by a bomb dropped from an aeroplane the day before my arrival. It had made a gap in the pavement near the parapet, which was still stained with the blood of the victims. Two men who were standing chatting on the bridge fell together ; one died shortly after, but the other, who had both legs cut off by the stream of bullets, was said to be in hospital and doing well. A third bomb fell on the Institute of St. Joseph, killing and wounding several men of the "garde civique" who were stationed there. I found a small hotel in front of the station, where I decided to put up during my stay in Namur. The proprietor, a round, jolly Belgian, was serving out *petites gouttes* to his customers, while his equally stout wife made me welcome, and told me I could take my pick of the rooms, back or front, as there was practically nobody staying in the hotel. I sat down to a plain *table d'hôte* dinner, my only table companions being a young, dark, powdered lady, a music-hall singer, and her husband or business manager.

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They had left Charleroi under the impression that it was safer in Namur, which everybody asserted to be impregnable—they had reckoned without the new German siege-guns. I was asked on all sides and by everybody I came in contact with if I had seen any French soldiers and “Where are the English?” “Mais où sont les Anglais?” was on the lips of every man, woman, and child throughout the length and breadth of Belgium. They all seemed to think that if they saw the English they were saved.

At about five o'clock heavy rain began falling, and then for the first time the booming sound of heavy cannon was heard proceeding from the north-east in the direction of Fort Marchevelette. This was the opening bourdon note of the concert which was to go on for the next three days, culminating in the grand finale of the bursting shells in the town. The firing went on for about an hour and was resumed in the evening, when it increased in volume owing to the easterly fort of Maizeret joining in with its deep droning note. Late that night we understood the meaning of it when troops of fugitives poured in from the village of Marchelles-Dames, situated on the bank of the Meuse, in the interval between Forts Maizeret and Marchevelette. I was just going to bed, rather tired and spent with the fatigues and emotions of the day,

when a rat-tat-tat came on the door of the empty hotel, re-echoing lugubriously through the corridors and rooms. The landlord cautiously opened the door and admitted a stout, jovial, iron-grey man, accompanied by his pale-haired wife.

“I’m the apothecary of Marche-les-Dames, and the Alboches are sowing shrapnel in my garden,” he said, with a rumbling laugh, and asked if they could have a bed. He was told there was plenty of room, and when they had retired we all did likewise.

I got into bed, the low organ note of the distant forts firing coming in the whole night through the open window; one might liken it to a gigantic cat purring. On the next morning (Friday, the 21st) I called at the Staff quarters of the town defence in the hopes of being able to obtain permission to do some sketching in the firing line, but this was refused. I then returned to the hotel and got my direction from the homeless apothecary with the intention of going to Marche-les-Dames to get a view of the fighting. On the outskirts of the town I passed a square crammed with a black mass of throbbing motor-cars with a pall of blue vapour from their exhausts hanging over them. They were filled with boxes of ammunition and food, waiting for orders to be taken to the front. Walking along the fine broad avenue which skirts the Meuse at

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this point, I came to the first sentry guarding the rear of the lines; he passed me on to his officer, a jovial lieutenant, who, with his men, was in charge of the supplies. The latter kindly directed me, and I went along the road, with overhanging cliffs on my left and the Meuse on my right, meeting crowds of fugitives from the outlying villages. I arrived at a bridge over the railway where there was a strong guard, and after again showing my papers was told there was nothing to see on the lower road except flying shells. They directed me, and I found myself alone in a cornfield where the shells whistled uncomfortably close overhead on their way to the forts; they rattled like trains coming from a distance. Passing up a sunken road cut through a wood, I arrived on a broad plateau sown with hemp, with, on the other side, the church and houses of Boninne standing out of the surrounding trees. As I arrived at the outskirts of the village I met Belgian soldiers retreating whilst shrapnel fell amongst them like rain. I returned with them across the open fields, the shells following us till we reached the shelter of the sunken road. A company of Engineers were busily erecting barbed-wire entanglements in front of the trenches, which had been dug at the edge of the wood. As the Germans got the range the shells began dropping in among them, and they were consequently

ordered to take up a position in the wood spreading on both sides of the road. From my place of vantage I could see the bombardment of the village across the plateau. The shells fell on the church and monastery adjoining, the dust rising in clouds from the great gaping wounds in the roof. Right across on our right the flat top of Fort Maizeret, rising out of the woods, could be seen smoking like a volcano, great clouds of earth drifting upwards from its sides, the result of the pounding it was getting. I talked with a young artillery officer whose battery was in position on the edge of the wood waiting to go into action. He had fought at Liége and been taken prisoner, but had escaped in mufti with nineteen of his men. As the men were crowding too much in the open he ordered them back, not, as he said, on their account, but because they would attract the shell fire on to his guns. A Belgian battery in another wood near Boninne was firing too close to a Belgian position, whereupon he gently trotted his horse across the shell-swept fields and warned them, his men remarking admiringly, "Il a du sang-froid, notre lieutenant !" ("He's a cool chap, is our lieutenant !")

The position remaining the same, I returned towards the town, keeping this time on the ridge of hills until I came to a road in Bouge which

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dropped down steeply to the Meuse. This road, deeply cut through chalk cliffs, was filled with a motley crowd of ambulance men and carriages, well out of the reach of harm, but much too far from the firing-line, in my opinion. Many of the volunteer Red Cross men were priests, with first-aid boxes strapped round their waists over their black soutanes. They were sprawling asleep on the grass, their thick grey stockings showing from under their skirts and their shovel-hats over their unshaven faces—a more lugubrious sight than the fighting men out yonder over the ridge. Farther on under a railway-shed I passed an improvised chapel : the altar was made up of wheels and pieces of machinery, supporting a rough plank, over which was stretched a piece of clean linen. The reredos was a sheet of red cloth, hung on the wall and flanked by religious banners. On the wall near by was pasted a small notice, informing the soldiers that a service was held at six in the morning and that during active service the Holy Sacrament could be partaken of without previous fasting. It was a scene worthy of the pencil of a great artist, and I turned away regretfully townwards to rest my weary limbs. I found that the inhabitants were still quite calm. At the hotel the few guests crowded round me to know how the fighting was going, and seemed quite annoyed



BONINNE.

"From my place of vantage I could see the bombardment of the village." (*See page 31.*)



MASS.

"A service was held at six in the morning." (*See page 32.*)

with me because I did not bring back the news that the Belgians were routing the Germans. The apothecary with the roaring laugh slapped me on the back, saying something in Walloon equivalent to our English "Are we downhearted?" and shook with merriment. News of heavy firing on the west side was brought in and that Brussels was taken; this brought a look of blank consternation on every face. I tried to explain to them that they must not take it too seriously, as it had no strategic but only a moral effect; but I do not think that my philosophy reassured them to any great extent. I retired from the discussion, and, being very tired, went to bed and slept soundly to the accompaniment of heavy firing from the forts.

Next morning, August 22nd, I went out before breakfast, and saw two regiments of French soldiers march into the town, stepping out springily, although they had had a long and tiring march behind them. Their deep red trousers and blue overcoats, buttoned back, made a pleasant change of colour after the monotonous black of the Belgian infantry. They all seemed full of spirits and in the best of humour as they waved their hands to the townsfolk, who had turned out half-dressed to greet them. Their reception was delirious, the men giving them great handfuls

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of cigars and cigarettes and the women pouring steaming coffee out of big coffee-pots into their tin cups as they passed. In spite of their heaped-up knapsacks, some of them with tin cans and cooking implements rising above their heads, which made them look like a gang of travelling tinkers, they marched on with a springy step, their lithe, spectacled officer striding confidently at their head. A detachment of machine-guns stopping, the curious crowded round to get a peep at these deadly weapons. The parts of the machine were strapped in leather sheaths to the sides of a horse, others following with long ammunition-boxes on either side, containing rows of clips of twenty murderous-looking spiked cartridges.

I returned to the hotel and found some one from whom I hired a bicycle, on which I made my way to the Bouge-Boninne gap. A new sentry being behind the lines, I had trouble, as strict orders had been given that no one was to pass. The stamp of the Ministère de la Guerre impressed him sufficiently to allow me to go on to the officers, who stopped me from going farther, but told me I could go another way up a ridge where I could see detachments of French infantry heading in the direction of Boninne. When climbing this rocky ridge I was stopped at every yard, but at length came into the ravine-like road.

The ambulance was now busier, the priests transferring the wounded who came from the firing-line in motors into a hospital van. I went on along the road on the top of the ridge towards the road through the pine-wood. A French stretcher-bearer who had been to fetch a doctor borrowed my bicycle to return to the firing-line, so I walked on under the trees, rattling with falling shrapnel, until I came to the edge of the wood on the plateau where I had stood the day before. Here a fierce engagement was going on, the trenches made on the previous day being now filled with Belgians firing across the plateau into the Germans coming out of the wood opposite. French troops were rushing up at the double to reinforce the men far out in the cornfields on the left. The battery on my right was firing off a few desultory rounds under a murderous rain of whistling shrapnel. To the crackling of our infantry, the bang and shrill piping of the rain of bullets from the bursting shrapnel, to the explosion of our field-guns was now added the bubbling of the French mitrailleuses, whilst as a background one could hear the dominant bass of the cannon from the surrounding forts. As one came from the shade of the road into the sunlit fields it was as if one suddenly turned out of a dim corridor into a brilliantly lighted arena in

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which a gigantic martial play was being performed. The French stretcher-bearers, carrying their rifles *en bandoulière*, were doing splendid work, coolly fetching the wounded out of the trenches. I found the ambulance man who had borrowed my bicycle working at the wounded round the field-guns in the wood. On my approach he looked up and smilingly asked me if I had found my bike ; on my answering in the negative he explained what he had done with it as calmly and politely as if he were sitting at a table in his café taking an *apéritif*. He had left it with some Belgian wounded, who I found had sent one of their comrades on it to fetch water.

A Belgian officer was rushing about, Browning in hand, rounding up a few shirkers. “ Allez, au feu, ou je vous brûle la cervelle ! ” (“ Come on now back into the firing-line, or I’ll blow your brains out ! ”) he said. One man protested that the adjutant had sent him back because his feet were sore, but the lieutenant paternally pushed him along, saying he could tell that yarn to the Horse Marines !

He was hoarse from shouting, and asked me if I had any water. I gave him my waterbottle, which he drained. It was easy to understand the feelings of the Belgian soldiers who had never been under fire, for the noise of the shrapnel was

terrific, but many of them told me that the noise was a great deal worse than the damage done, the shells bursting half-heartedly, and the wounds being mostly in the legs. One French soldier with a bullet in his leg was lying back on his knapsack and chaffing with me whilst the doctor was dressing the wound. There passed by on a stretcher a badly wounded officer who was still cheering on his men.

Presently the smashed remains of the battery crawled out of the wood, carrying their wounded on the limbers. One driver was supporting his comrade, who I could see was already dead, for blue shadows were creeping round the nose and his blood was pouring down the leather seat on which they were sitting, whilst his head hung limply backwards. He was tenderly handed down, and when the doctor removed his clothes a huge gaping wound was disclosed in his chest ; he was dead. They laid him to rest on some sheaves of ripe corn, where he was left with his grey upturned face and glazing eyes staring up at the sky through the trees. I had looked on unmoved, and was surprised at my own callousness, but when the danger of instant death is all around one there seems no room for pity. I thought of Shakespeare's line—

“ All pity choked with custom of fell deeds.”

I put in my pocket a few ears of corn on which he

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lay, and placed them with some flowers I had picked on the battlefield.

The German shell fire was rapid and continuous ; every three minutes or so four shells exploded almost simultaneously. Their method was, I noticed, that as soon as resistance slackened, they sent a rain of shrapnel beyond the evacuated position, advancing fifty yards or so between each salvo, and thus trying to change the retreat into a rout. They found the range very rapidly, which many of those around me ascribed to the information they obtained from spies, but in my opinion it was due rather to their precision and to the detailed and accurate maps they carried with them.

Having found my cycle, I left the scene of action, passing many limping soldiers on the way, and pedalled on to the bank of the Meuse. I was talking to the supply officer who was stationed at the mill, and who had directed me on the previous day, when some heavy shells came hurtling in the road, falling a hundred yards behind me, then a hundred yards farther on, and so on till they reached the centre of the town, leaving a track of crumbling houses from which issued a cloud of dust. This insane bombardment of defenceless houses was evidently done with the object of causing a panic in the town, a method of warfare which I have remarked the Germans are fond of.

Namur lay like a panorama before me, and I had an opportunity of sketching the bombardment with the permission of the friendly supply officer. When I had finished my sketch I packed up my drawing materials, and on arriving at the outskirts of the town under the leafy avenue, I was surprised to see the supply motor-cars all roaring off one after the other as if in a panic. The explanation only dawned on me later in the evening.

When I arrived in the town the people were still quite calm, the shells having done no great damage, and no lives having been lost. They had mostly fallen on unoccupied houses, and one had found its billet on a corner of the statue of Leopold I which stood in the middle of the square, and as our jolly apothecary remarked with his customary optimism, "left our Leopold unwounded!" The powdered lady still seemed annoyed with me that I was not the bearer of good news, and no doubt ascribed it to my contrary nature. And why didn't the English soldiers come and help? The apothecary laughingly roared out, "Ah! we English come in at the finish, eh?" making a grabbing sweep with his hand and diving it into his pocket, at the same time giving me another painfully friendly slap on the shoulder. The plump proprietress said, "Well, let the Germans come and the suspense will be over; I'm sure when they do come

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I'll open the door and say, 'Come inside, gentlemen, and what will you have for dinner?' " at the same time bending her stout form in a mock bow. These humorous proceedings, however, were put a sudden stop to by the news that Fort Marchovelette was blown up. This proved to be an idle rumour, and was later officially denied, the facts being that a gun having been fired before the cupola was properly raised, the latter had been dislodged from its position, so that it could not be closed, and the gun was thus exposed to the heavy German shell fire. This caused a panic to break out among the bombardiers, nineteen of whom escaped to the town and spread the rumour that it had blown up. The bombardiers were, however, taken back to their work under an escort of gendarmerie, and the defence continued. This probably was the explanation of the unusual movement among the crowd of motors in the square outside the town which I had remarked on earlier.

News came in from the west that the Germans were trying to cross the Sambre at Moustier at the cost of enormous losses, the dead standing in heaps in some places, and the Sambre running red with blood. I wondered how my friends there had been getting on, for I heard that that part had been heavily shelled. I had now to make a momentous decision ; should I leave Namur and

make for the French lines immediately, or was there still time? As I thought that the back door out of Namur was still open for me to escape to the south, I decided to risk it and stay another day, although I knew that the Germans were on the right bank of the Meuse. Having once made up my mind, I went to bed and slept again the sound sleep induced by living in the open air with every faculty keenly awake.

The fighting went on all night, so after an early breakfast I cycled again to the scene of action, namely, the only interval between the forts that the Germans were attacking. The avenue empty of motor-cars seemed ominous; passing the sentry, I came to the bottom of the steep road sunk deep between the rocks. Here was an utter confusion of motors, ambulance-wagons, field pieces, and ammunition-wagons all waiting about helplessly. I threaded and dodged my way through this disordered mass of vehicles and men and at length came to the top of the road, where there was a group of doctors looking out upon the scene. The fighting was now going on in and around the wood where I had watched the engagements on previous occasions. The French were stubbornly retiring across the fields on our left, fighting every inch, and the Belgians were retiring on their third and last position and digging supplementary

trenches. To disguise their position they pulled down a cornstack in the field. Still I saw no Germans, although the fields in front were being swept with a hail of shrapnel fire. Through my binoculars I followed the advance of the bursting shells and saw six French soldiers retreating in the line of fire. I strained my eyes and my heart beat more quickly as I saw the storm of shrapnel whirl round them as they ran for cover. Through my glasses it looked as if none of them would reach their comrades alive. Suddenly to my horror I saw some shells burst right in amongst them, and they fell down like a swath of corn under the scythe. I kept my glasses on the prostrate forms for a minute or more, but they did not move. Then one slowly and cautiously raised his head and looked gingerly round, got on his hands, and with a bound made off like a rabbit through the corn ! “ There’s one brave fellow safe ! ” I thought, and was lowering my glasses when I saw the other five jump up and scuttle off to safety. They cut such a comical figure, and my relief was so intense, that I burst out laughing. No doubt the explosion had stunned them for the moment, but they had escaped the bullets.

Sheltered behind a house I observed the shell fire, standing near two soldiers who were guarding a quantity of ammunition. They laughingly observed that I had better mind a shell did not drop

into it as it would make mincemeat of us. One of them told me the story of the death of one of the Counts von Bülow. They belonged to the 8th regiment, and were scouting, accompanied by a corporal, when they saw in the woods near Andenne, situated well outside the line of forts, a patrol of Uhlans come out of a wood into a clearing. They were all good shots, like most Belgians, and, each picking his man, they fired. One dropped from his horse and another was wounded, but the rest took to their heels, no doubt thinking the enemy was in force. They ran up to the unhorsed Uhlan, who, grasping a revolver in one hand and a Browning in the other, was making ineffectual attempts to shoot. My narrator said he shot him through the mouth, the first shot having got him in the chest. The little Belgian, to do him justice, said he did not know it was an officer till he saw his gold watch and trinkets and that his helmet was silver-plated under the grey cover. He took the spoils of war, including a large sum of money found on his victim, to his superior officer, who handed it over to the proper authorities. The man proudly showed me a clip of revolver cartridges which his officer had allowed him to keep, and gave me one as a memento; the bullets were, I noticed, flat-topped.

A French officer asked me if I thought the forts

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could hold out another twenty-four hours, and I told him I understood from the people of the town that they were quite capable of keeping the enemy at bay for another month. "In that case we are saved," he remarked, "for our field artillery will have time to come up." As events turned out this proved a vain hope, and we never caught sight of the French guns. It now struck me that if I wanted to get out of the town I had better return and pack my things, as the retreat was getting much too close to Namur for my liking. I sped down the hill, passing the mournful gunners standing by their wrecked pieces, and was showing my papers to the sentry when a suspicious Belgian soldier came and interfered, saying he had seen me in the firing-line, and that it ought to be looked into as it seemed fishy. The sentry was discussing the matter with him, telling him my papers were in order, when I was surprised to see a regiment of French soldiers with their officer at the head go marching by in the direction of the town. I was all the more surprised at this as I had left them fighting at the top of the hill not half an hour before. The explanation soon came in the shape of heavy shells from the siege-guns, which hurtled in amongst us. One exploded in a school on the right near the marching regiment, covering us with dust, the other dropped into the Meuse hard by.

The Germans were at their old trick of speeding the parting guest. This time they were successful, for the whole battalion broke into the double, followed by fleeing Belgians. It was no wonder, for the deafening explosion of these shells is enough to put panic into the stoutest heart, especially if one is already retreating before a victorious enemy. I pedalled on ahead of the soldiers, who branched off and dashed into their barracks, no doubt to fetch their kits out before they beat a retreat towards the French frontier. Meanwhile the shells kept whistling overhead, keeping up an infernal concert that was nerve-racking in the extreme. I was now in the town, which for all the world was like a deserted city stricken with some awful plague that had suddenly swept away the inhabitants; not a soul was to be seen in the streets. I took a wrong turning and missed my way to the hotel, but as I could still find nobody to direct me, I pedalled on as hard as I could through the dead streets, in which the shells now and then burst with fearful effect. I began to recognize my surroundings, and put on an extra spurt to regain the hotel and start my flight south. At a cross-road some rifle shots flew by me, one whizzing close to my ear and making me duck. They must have been fired, I think, by some Belgians who took me for a German with my long grey cape flying behind

me. It was, of course, impossible for the Germans to be already in the town. I was heartily glad that the street took a sharp turn and hid me from these panic shooters, who might very well have picked me off and put an abrupt end to my tour. On I dashed across the empty square and through the rows of empty tables on the pavement in front of the hotel till a hop, skip, and a jump brought me to the door. I hammered for some time at the door, but at length the scared proprietor crept gingerly downstairs and cautiously opened it an inch or two. On seeing me he yielded a few more inches, and I slipped in. I looked round in astonishment, for the dining-room was quite still and empty and the hotel seemed deserted. "We're all down in the cellar," said the proprietor. "Come along with us."

I followed him down a dim flight of steps into the musty-smelling cellar, where a strange sight met my eyes. Under the whitewashed arched vaults, sitting huddled up on barrels, boxes, and old furniture, were the guests and staff of the hotel. On the top of wine-bins were perched the younger men, whilst in another cellar beyond crowded the women, looking at me with pale and scared faces. The apothecary was still in his jolly humour, his loud laugh increased tenfold as it rumbled under the vaults and re-echoed in the

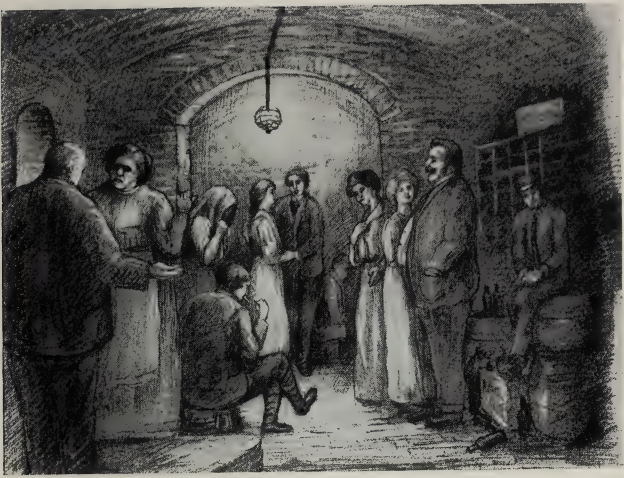
second cellar, whilst his little blonde wife peeped round his elbow. The painted and powdered lady greeted me with a reproachful stare as if I were the cause of the terrific sounds which penetrated down to the cellar and made it tremble and shake round us. Another guest, a girl who had come to Namur to be near her young man, who was working with the ambulance, seemed now to be blissfully content, for he was sitting next to her. They were holding hands and looking into each other's eyes oblivious of the people sitting round them. A scullery-maid, who came rushing in with a shawl tightly held over her head and ears for protection, brought an involuntary smile to my lips, though the position was anything but comic. At every reverberation the women would clutch each other, shut their eyes, and draw a long, trembling breath through their clenched teeth, whilst the men seemed to stiffen every muscle. It was a weird sight under the flickering yellow light of the single gas-jet.

The stout proprietress was the only one in a real panic, her strident, brassy voice dominating even the din of the bombardment as she screamed orders to her Jean, the comfortable, patient hotelier. Two soldiers had rushed into the hotel just behind me when the door was opened ; but when Madame saw them she yelled to Jean to

turn them out, as the Germans would burn the hotel down if they caught the military in her house. I went upstairs with the good hotelier and met one of the soldiers, who had scrambled into ill-fitting civilian attire and wrapped his uniform in a sheet. He ran out into the street, dragging his rifle behind him, and disappeared round a corner, hugging the walls of the houses and ducking at each shell. Whilst this was going on we heard a shot from an adjacent room, followed by the dull thud of a body falling. The proprietor rushed in and came out with a very white face, saying that the other poor fellow had committed suicide with his rifle.

I ran up to my room, collected my drawing materials and notes that were lying strewn about, and packed my knapsack at the double. My haste was only too natural, for the angry whistling of the shells overhead came in through the open window, giving an additional spur to my efforts. I then returned to the cellar, and was greeted by the screaming landlady, telling me I was to remain down below and not go upstairs. I tried to calm the good dame with a little fatalistic philosophy, which, I am bound to admit, did not have the desired effect.

“Madame,” said I, “si un obus tombe sur la maison d’à côté, nous sommes sauvés, mais si



THE CELLAR.

"it was a weird sight." (*See page 46.*)



THE BARN.

"the reclining forms of Zouaves upon the straw." (*See page 68.*)

au contraire il tombe sur l'hôtel, eh bien, nous sommes fichus ! ” (“ If a shell falls on the next house, we are saved ; but if it falls on the hotel—well, we are done for ! ”)

They seemed to think that the floors would stop the irresistible force of these enormously powerful shells that had crashed their way through the steel and cement of the forts ! Seeing that cool thinking was beyond her, I abandoned the argument, but she kept on shouting and screaming that if an Englishman were caught in the hotel they would all be shot. I pulled out a cigarette as I was dying for a smoke, but she flew at me, asking me if I wanted to “ faire sauter l'hôtel ” (to “ blow up the hotel ”), as there were spirits in the second cellar.

“ Well, let me go upstairs and get out of this,” I said, beginning to get tired of this yelling and gesticulating and wanting to make good my escape, for I had heard so many stories of German atrocities that the least I could expect was to be shot. The other guests now joined in the din with cries of “ Sortez, monsieur ; vous nous exposez à être fusillés ! ” (“ Clear out, you are putting us in danger of being shot ! ”) The landlady was now setting up such a tumult that I held my ears and said : “ Madame, vous faites un tel vacarme que je ne puis pas entendre le canon ! ”

(" You are making such a row that I can't hear the guns ! ")—a remark which caused the jolly apothecary to let off a shattering broadside of laughter. At last the stout landlady decided to let me go upstairs, so I wished them all good-bye and good luck, and, after receiving a parting benedictory slap from the little apothecary, I left them, followed by his roaring laugh and his " Are we downhearted ? "

Upstairs the proprietor was looking for his keys whilst his wife made out my bill, and in spite of her agitation she never omitted a single item in the account. I was looking out of the window while this was being done, observing the square, strewn with knapsacks and even rifles, thrown away by the fleeing Belgians, and a few of these latter were running, doubled up, hugging the shelter of the railway-station. I was interrupted in my observations by hearing the rattling noise made by a heavy shell when it gets near the end of its journey, and immediately ducked on the seat under the window. As I did so the crash came, pieces of pavement and stones smashing into the window over my head and rattling all over the room. When the lull came I looked out and perceived a huge hole in front of the hotel large enough to bury a wagon and horses in. The shell had fallen on the tramlines, which the force of the explosion had twisted up in the air four or five feet high,

with the overhead wires hanging in a tangled heap over them. Happily, none of the escaping Belgians were hurt by the explosion, but it naturally did not tend to soothe the nerves of Madame, who set up deafening screams and tried to drag Jean back into the cellar and me along with him. I escaped from her hands, however, and, the door being now open, ran into the street, waving them an adieu. I was warned by a fugitive soldier whom I came across to be careful not to touch the electric wires that were hanging about all over the road, as I might get a fatal shock. As I had left my hired bicycle at the hotel I ran as hard as I could pelt in the direction of the fleeing troops, the shells still whistling uncannily overhead and giving me a pressing reminder that I had no time to lose.

We reached the outskirts of the town and caught up a section of infantry, whose ranks were being continually swelled by stragglers and who were more of a mob than an army. Outside the town the officer lined them up, and when he had got them into some sort of order we marched off in a westerly direction, leaving behind us the town, from which the sounds of bombardment had suddenly ceased. The officer in charge had by no means lost his head, for, seeing me marching with the troops, he examined my papers, after which we walked along together the best of friends.

Namur was evacuated—I could not understand it! I had been informed in the town that the general commanding the defences of the town had left with his staff that morning at ten o'clock. The four days of hard fighting against the overwhelming numbers and the superior artillery of the Germans had only resulted in retarding the spike of the investing German army that was thrust between the north and western forts of Marchevelette and Maizeret. The fortnight's lull in the fighting since the fall of Liège had enabled the Germans to bring their siege-guns almost within firing distance of the forts, and then the reduction of the latter had only been a matter of time and patience. Meanwhile the Germans had crossed the Sambre on the west well out of reach of the forts, and were pushing on, pressing the retreating French forces. The invaders were already far south on the right bank of the Meuse, which they crossed near Profondville, giving battle to the retreating French troops which had left Namur and eventually joining hands with their western troops, thus closing the net. It seemed to me as if the French generals had only thought at the last moment of making strategic use of Namur, and that before sufficient troops could come up the enormous weight of the Germans in the west had already caused the retreat of the French at Charleroi and the British at Mons.

CHAPTER III

I ESCAPE FROM NAMUR AND HAVE AN UNPLEASANT SIESTA

AS I marched along beside my new acquaintance, I heard general complaints from the officers that the General Staff had not before leaving Namur left instructions as to the line of retreat. The route, however, was well marked for the first mile or two by the discarded knapsacks, ammunition, rifles, and coats of the fleeing regiments, who had thrown away their kits in order to get along more easily. On passing a farm the owner came out and informed us that two mitrailleuses had been left in his barn, and as he feared the consequences if the Germans should find them there he was anxious to get rid of them as soon as possible. Orders were at once given to remove the compromising guns, and they followed our motley collection of soldiers of all arms. Farther on we caught up an officer, whom I had seen fighting that morning, accompanied by the remnants of his company ; he wore the uniform of a private,

and his greatcoat hung down his legs in rags and tatters, which he laughingly held up to show me. He had pinned the stars indicating his rank on the inside of the lapel of his tunic, and carried slung over his shoulder a carbine which he had taken from a dead cavalryman. He seemed highly pleased with his acquisition, for he explained that at home he was a *bon fusil* (a good shot), and had done a lot of shooting, so that he reckoned he would be able to make good use of the carbine. He was especially proud of the way his men had stood by him at the last fierce charge of the Germans at Bouge. His one care was for his men, and when we—that is, the officer, a young doctor, and myself, who had nothing to carry and could step out—were setting the pace a little too fast, he would pull us up with a “Steady ! remember, the men have got a load on their backs.” The young doctor, who lived at Namur, was bemoaning the fact that he had not taken the opportunity of changing into mufti, as if he had done so he would have easily escaped and thus been of more use to his country, since he could rejoin the army at Antwerp, whilst now if they caught him he would be impressed into the German hospital service. Thus chatting and comparing notes, we came to a road winding up through dense woods and came out under Fort Suarlée. Here we met the guard

defending the outworks, lying about in their covered trenches. Hearing the sound of terrific rending explosions coming regularly every minute from the fort above us, I thought this must be due to its guns firing on the enemy, but was told by one of the fortress guards that it was the enemy's shells falling on the concrete protections of the fort, the hail of projectiles being so rapid and continuous that the gunners inside were not able to raise the cupola in order to retaliate. The powerful explosives bursting so near caused the whole hill to tremble; it was as if some Titan smith wielding a mighty sledge-hammer was using the hill as an anvil. I asked one of the guards if we were in any danger, and he replied that if the enemy's siege-guns were deviated a few millimetres, the shells would probably fall on us, which was not very reassuring. The soldiers rested a while in the uncertain shelter of the fort, and whilst we stayed there a man with a wound in his hand came up to the young doctor, who could unfortunately do nothing for him as he had no bandages. He told me afterwards that if the wound were not seen to there was a probability of it turning to blood-poisoning.

We were then given our bearings, and making a detour round the fort, went on in the direction of Flawine. We had to leave one of our men

behind as he was suffering from cramp in the legs. Another who was troubled with sore feet took his boots off and revealed that his feet were one mass of raw flesh owing to the continual marching. We were now on the top of a ridge, and on looking back towards the town saw on the opposite side the village of Bouge, situated on the overlying ridge which we had left that morning, and which was now a line of flames against the evening sky. We arrived at the village of Flawine, passing the unused and now useless trenches and barbed wire entanglements which I had admired a few days before on my entry into Namur. The inhabitants complained of the quantity of dynamite that had been left unexploded, and which naturally constituted a serious danger. One man who came running up to us said that his house was full of it, and he wanted to know what he should do. We again rested our weary men, and the young doctor and I went and foraged for some supper, which we made of bread and cheese bought in a little shop.

While we were munching our bread and cheese, a sturdy little Flemish soldier gleefully pulled out a watch which he had taken from a German officer in the heat of a *mêlée*. In bad French he exclaimed, "Je avais son horloge" ("I got his clock"), and went on to explain that in fighting in Bouge round the houses

he had shot his man through the cheek. His enemy fell and lay blinking his eyes; the little Belgian mimicked him comically, and with rifle upraised showed us how he had smashed his head in with the butt-end and taken his watch. Our officer put an end to his gruesome acting by shouting out, "Tais-toi, blagueur !" ("Hold your tongue, you humbug !")

We crossed the Sambre, and as night was rapidly falling the captain in charge decided to house his tired men in a railway shed which was handy. The men ran and cleared a field of its stooks of corn, which they scattered over the floor as bedding. Hearing the officers talk of getting up at five in the morning, and being aware of the vast encircling movement of the Germans already begun the day before, I thought it wiser to push on if I was to regain the French lines. I walked on alone along the pitch-dark lane, and seeing some shadowy forms moving along the road in my direction, I stopped; they came on stealthily, thinking that I was an enemy. I soon reassured them, and found they were of the same opinion as myself and wanted to go on ahead. A whispered consultation was held, and we decided that as there was a danger of our falling into the hands of Uhlan patrols, we had better hide till daybreak. We quietly knocked at the door of a farm and asked

the peasant who came to give us shelter for the night. The good man took us to a hayloft, and one by one we climbed up the ladder, the men pulling their rifles noiselessly behind them. My tired comrades—there were five of them—threw themselves on the hay and were instantly snoring, but I half-opened the shutter and lay down beside it, sleeping lightly with one eye open, for I had no intention of being caught napping. Through this precaution I was awakened by the sound of the muffled march of a regiment creeping by. Were they Prussians? I strained my ears and was relieved to hear the sound of mumbled Walloon. Ruthlessly waking up the men from their slumbers, I told them I thought it must be the regiment we had left behind in the shed who had changed their minds and started out earlier, which subsequently turned out to be true. We slipped down to the kitchen, where the good wife gave us a welcome breakfast of coffee and bread-and-curds. As I was provided with maps, which we conned on the kitchen floor by the light of a candle, they appointed me leader, and we warily marched out in the night in single file.

As we passed under the Fort de Malonne we met a bombardier who told us that the fort was deserted and all the garrison had left, the commandant having given orders for all the breech

pieces to be taken out and thrown into the well, and telling the men to escape as best they could. He had asked for a few volunteers to remain with him to blow up the fort. Owing to its southerly position this fort had not fired a single shot, and I was given to understand that it was the smallest of the ring of forts. As we were conversing, a woman approached, and on hearing that the commandant was still in the fort, burst into wailing. I could not make out whether she was his wife or daughter as she was hysterical. A friend came up and took her home, and we marched on. When day broke we soon found the trail again by the cartridges and accoutrements which littered the road. The men even in their flight, fearing lest the enemy might make use of the ammunition, heaved it over the hedge punctiliously.

On the way we collected stragglers in twos and threes, which brought up our number to twenty by the time we had caught up the regiment. I rejoined my friends the officer and the doctor, loaves of brown bread were handed out, and we breakfasted, washing it down with water. We now swung along through fine wooded rolling country until we reached a cross-road, in a valley, where fugitives coming from the road on our left hand situated behind Bois-de-Villers told us that the Germans had crossed the Meuse by swimming.

My friend the officer was for requisitioning an ox to make some soup for his men, but he was overruled and we took the road to the right, which presently brought us to a ravine-like road winding through the woods up to a village named Arbre. This road was blocked with baggage and ambulance-wagons, guns, cavalry, and carts, through which our company wormed itself till at last we arrived on the top of the hill in the village. The village itself was also full of troops in disorder; we were behind the lines of the Belgian troops engaging the Germans who had crossed the Meuse, and thought we were saved, but we evidently came up at the end of the fight and orders were given to retreat. We found ourselves thus at the head of a column heading south; the whole mass of weary soldiers, piled-up wagons, and tired horses dragged its way down a long, straight road, passing trampled fields of corn dotted with the huddled forms of French soldiers in their red-and-blue uniforms, sometimes blocked by overturned gun-carriages, dead horses, and split trees, the result of the deadly artillery fire. On we tramped through the devastation under the broiling August sun.

The doctor and I were pressing forward to reach the head of the column, when suddenly the whole of it stopped. We looked ahead and saw a group of officers accompanied by a lancer waving a large

white flag and searching amongst the fields to come in contact with the German outposts. The men round us were reluctantly unloading their guns and the officers their Brownings, and I realized that the column had been unable to escape the grip of the German tentacles and that we were surrounded and surrendering.

My position as a civilian amongst troops being ambiguous, and having no wish to become a prisoner of war, I shook hands with my friends and left the surrendering army. My hands itched to pick up one of the discarded Brownings, but fortunately I restrained myself or I should not have lived to tell the tale, for had I been caught by the Germans in possession of a weapon they would have shot me immediately, as events proved. I crossed the sunlit fields, skirting a lonely wood, where I passed the prostrate forms of French soldiers in a ditch and saw in the distance a village vibrating in the heat of the midday sun, situated on the slopes of a hill, which eventually turned out to be St. Gérard. Some of the houses I could see were roofless and others had a large brown patch on their slate roofs caused by the dust thrown up by the shells in entering. I warily approached, keeping a sharp look-out. All was terribly still. I was getting near the first house when suddenly I saw, thirty yards from me, a Uhlan, sitting a pie-

bald horse, watching the cross-roads. His head, however, was fortunately turned away from me. I made one dash which brought me into the garden of the cottage, where I dropped at full length into some enormous red cabbages and crawled towards the boundary hedge, worming myself into the ditch, full of nettles, where I lay still. I now had an opportunity of observing the famous methods of intimidation practised by the Germans; from all over the village came shouts of "Halt!" followed by shots. Cautiously raising myself, I scanned the village with my field-glasses, and saw a grey-coated soldier driving a peasant into his cottage with the butt-end of his rifle. Shots still proceeded from the village, so I lay still and drew my grey mackintosh cape over me, covering my face with my cap to conceal myself as much as possible. My position was precarious, as the hedge bounding the garden had on the other side a wide path and the garden itself sloped upwards to the main road, the cottage standing at the junction. I presently heard on the road the incessant rumble of cannon, and so knew that I was fixed for the day.

Owing to the heat and to the long march from Namur I fell asleep, but, soon waking up from an unpleasant dream, saw right in front of my nose through the hedge the heels of a German soldier, resting on his rifle, quietly contemplating

the country-side. Had I made the slightest movement on waking he would have discovered me ! I kept quite still, hardly daring to breathe. At last there came along an unsuspecting peasant. My would-be sentry sprang at him with an "Allez !" and the old man whimpered in Walloon : " I've done nothing ; I've just given one of you chaps five francs." The brute roughly pushed him along with the barrel of his gun, apostrophizing him with a " Fort, Schweinhund ! " (" Get along, you dirty dog ! "), and drove him towards the village. The coast being clear, I took the opportunity of a cessation in the passing of the batteries along the road to change my quarters to an angle formed by the one hedge and another running through the garden, improving my burrow by planting twigs as a screen. I passed the long hours away by reconnoitring and dozing, and at length crawled to the window of the cottage and quietly tapped. A scared peasant woman who came in answer told me that after ill-treating the villagers the Germans had taken them to the Mairie, where, after cautioning them as to their behaviour, the soldiers had given them wine taken from the mayor's bins. I asked her if she had any old clothes to give me so as to disguise myself as a peasant, but she had already given some to a fugitive Belgian and had no more. She advised me not to stay the night

there, as sentries would be posted and escape would be impossible, suggesting that I should take a child by the hand and thus pass out of the place with the fleeing peasants. The good woman could not see the incongruity of a man dressed in light English tweeds and puttees trying to palm himself off as a peasant father !

She declared, however, that she would not let me starve, and presently when I had returned to my lair she came into the garden with a bowl of coffee and a thick slice of bread and jam under her apron and set them down in the cabbages. After dining in this fashion I lay down again and now and then kept a look-out. At last I saw German soldiers in extended order coming across the fields, evidently making a drive to pick up stray Belgian soldiers from the surrendering column. Three came into the garden, so, concluding that it was all up and not wishing to be caught lying down, I stood up with my hands above my head. To my intense relief, the soldier, taking me for a villager, asked me in poor French if there was a way out of the garden. Naturally, I showed him another way than where my knapsack was lying ! He went off with the remark : " C'est triste, n'est-ce pas, la guerre ? " (" War's a sad thing, isn't it ? ")

I made my way to the front of the cottage and talked openly with the good woman, who gave

me my direction, and, my way being through the village, I walked up the hill until I came to two German officers sitting on chairs at the side of the road. One was a kindly-looking, middle-aged man, a major, the other a smart, close-cropped young lieutenant with big horn-mounted spectacles perched on his sunburnt nose. As I was passing them with as much appearance of unconcern as I could muster the young lieutenant called out, "Vous êtes un artiste?" and on my answering in the affirmative asked me where I was going and where I came from. I showed them my papers and maps; a private was called, who clicked heels, saluted, and proceeded to search me for weapons. I made out from the discussion that ensued that my young whipper-snapper of a lieutenant would have arrested me as a spy because I had marked the Namur forts on my map, but the older man soothed him down with a "Man muss verständig sein" ("One must have some common sense!"). Before the major dismissed me he informed me that the British Fleet had tried to take Heligoland and had lost six capital ships in the attempt; further, that they had annihilated the British Army. He advised me not to wander about the country at night as I should certainly be shot by patrols, but to sleep in the village. I thanked him for his courtesy and

turned back. The young lieutenant kept my tourist map of Belgium, and later on I felt the loss of it.

As I was looking for a café in the fast-gathering dusk I passed a château, and saw through the curtainless windows a fine old room, wainscoted to the ceiling, with a grand old-fashioned chimney. On the table, lighted by silver candelabra, was spread a supper at which some officers were sitting. Near by was another officer pulling off his boots, and at one side of the room stood an operating-table, with instruments laid out, faintly gleaming in the half light—a true picture of the ruthlessness of war invading a beautiful home.

I at length found a café, where they told me I might have a bed, though there was little room, as the place was full of soldiers. The proprietor and his wife were readjusting themselves to the new circumstances, whilst the daughter, drawing beer for the German soldiers, was already coquetting with them, never having had so many admirers at the same time. She spoke to me and told me that the soldiers were very kind, and showed me a handful of religious relics in little chased silver and gold boxes, the spoils of a château, given her by one of her admirers.

I supped on some cold beef and pickles and an old crust of bread—all that was left in the house. This was a feast of Lucullus after the privations of the last two days since I had left Namur.

CHAPTER IV

I AM TAKEN PRISONER AND MARCH WITH THE GERMANS

I WAS giving myself over to the friendly feeling induced by my relieved mind and the welcome supper when I marched a smooth-shaven, close-cropped officer—a captain this time—his silk-stockinged feet encased in brown slippers. He sharply asked me what I was doing there and what was my business and my nationality. I explained that I was an artist fleeing from Namur, and as to my nationality he could see from my passport that I was a naturalized Englishman of Belgian origin. A sharp order and a tall private stood at my side, clicked his heels, and saluted. We marched into the back kitchen, and the soldier proceeded to search my knapsack, feeling my rolled-up socks for hidden weapons and examining my drawings, which, however, he returned to me. My pockets were then superficially ransacked, but without any compromising result. The soldier was rather hurriedly replacing my drawing materials

when a terrific explosion of words came from the officer, telling him to treat the gentleman's things more gently. After carefully reading my official papers and collecting my notes, he told me in stilted English that "he was sorry he would have to arrest me, sir." My passport had been made out after the declaration of war, and this looked black against me, but I explained that the necessity for a passport had not arisen before the war. He replied it would be for his superior officer, to whom he would pass me on, to decide as to that, and meanwhile I must sleep with the prisoners of war.

I marched out under the frightened eyes of the family, and presently my escort and I were stumbling about the now pitch-dark village, holding on to each other like grim death. After repeatedly following shouted directions, we arrived in a big barn, where I saw by the dim light of a lantern hanging from the rafters the reclining forms of Zouaves in rows upon the straw. In dumb show my guard told me to lie down, the captives making room for me in the row. Some German soldiers were also lying about, evidently to relieve the one who was standing over us with fixed bayonet. The latter kindly filled his aluminium cup with wine and passed it to me as a nightcap. I was snuggling down into

the straw, pulling my cape over me as a bed-cover, when the officer arrived, and, after giving some orders to the guard, told me that if I tried to escape I should be immediately shot. I answered him I was too tired to try. He then began to count the prisoners, which, together with the look of the row of recumbent forms, gave me the creepy feeling of being already a corpse.

I expected to be court-martialled the following morning, so I reviewed all the possible points which I could bring forward in my defence to prove that I was not a spy. This being done, I quickly fell into a dreamless sleep. At five the next morning I woke up to find the barn doors being opened; the cold morning air came in, and the sentry, waking up the Zouaves, told them in dumb show they were to peel potatoes. I was rising to help, but was waved down and told I could sleep another hour. I got up, however, and washed in a bucket, a soldier following me about in all the details of my toilet. As I leaned against the barn I had an opportunity of watching the forming up of the marching column. The orders crackled along the line like musketry, the men lined up, snapping the numbers out and twisting their heads sharply at right angles as if they were biting the following man's nose off. They formed fours, the click of the heels at "atten-

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tion " and the dull thud of the shouldered arms coming as from one man. Woe to the man out of line ! The captain, prancing on his big charger, flashed out a flow of expletives which as they were passed on by his subordinates increased in intensity until they fell upon the head of the culprit like a tornado. I was just congratulating myself that I was to be left behind when the word was passed, "Wo ist der Engländer?" ("Where is the Englishman?") whereupon I was placed in the middle of the column and we marched out of the village.

The men surrounding me were all big, heavy fellows, belonging, in fact, to the élite regiment of the Imperial Guard. They marched the whole time with their arms shouldered, their coats rolled round their knapsacks, with a drinking cup hanging from their belts. They wore heavy boots, laced up at the sides, which, like all their accoutrements, seemed to be new. All was of a uniform grey colour ; the black-spiked helmet was covered with grey linen, and not a number nor a single scrap of colour was to be seen in the ranks. The non-commissioned officers were distinguished by a more or less long strip of silver braid on the collar, the officers by the cut and quality of the material of their uniform and a strip of brilliant red or blue at the neck. Every officer or non-

com. down to the lowest grade was provided with a map-case, slung across the shoulder, the map being folded behind a transparent celluloid front.

The difference between the spirit of the French troops I had seen and my neighbours was remarkable ; the light, springy walk of the "fantassin," the bandied chaff, the quick black eyes darting from under the képis, taking in everything at once, contrasted favourably with the heavy plodding in silence and the dull stare at the back of the preceding man. What a difference, too, in the relations between officers and men ! The Frenchman's address to his officer, his hand lightly touching his képi, was the affectionate yet respectful one of "Mon capitaine," probably answered with a "Eh bien, mon vieux?" Here the lower grades never addressed their officer except strictly on service duty, preceded by the salute, the heels clicking together and the hands slapping on the thighs. The officer either rapped out his orders, his face working like one demented, or coldly let the man stand before him at attention. The French officers marched in front of their men, reminding one of Old Testament shepherds, whilst the Germans drove theirs on from behind, the better to fall on an offender should one be out of line.

From six in the morning till one o'clock, when

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I left this regiment, the march was continuous, being only broken by a slight rest owing to a temporary stoppage in the traffic. In the villages we would pass soldiers holding buckets, into which we dipped our aluminium cups *en passant*; sometimes they would hold out a tin of mixed sweets or prunes, the spoils of war, out of which the soldiers fetched great handfuls, my guard always offering me his share. Behind us trundled the field kitchen, its little chimney smoking, and a smell of stew and coffee was wafted to us from the screwed-down kettles. I saw a van belonging to the field post, the armed blue-coated postman standing with a great leather bag open, into which the men showered their postcards as they marched by. On either side of the road we would pass trampled fields of corn, splashed here and there with the red and blue uniforms of French soldiers, who lay huddled up as they had fallen in the retreat from Charleroi. Sometimes one caught sight of a grey upturned face lying in the ditch, half-covered with a coat, a protruding brown hand still clutching at the sky. The German soldiers averted their eyes, then looked at one another. The carcasses of horses, smashed-up ammunition-wagons or trees now and then blocked the road.

Walled in by the grey soldiers, carrying my

knapsack and cape under the broiling sun, the dust flying about had made me as grey as the men themselves, filling my eyes and mouth to suffocation. In spite of the previous two days' march my legs held good, but the heat made me wish the end would soon arrive. Whenever we passed officers they would shout out, "Was ist das, ein Engländer?" One of them made the poor joke of waving me on, at the same time mimicking with his hands the gesture of shooting. This did not cheer me up. We at length arrived at a crossing, where I was handed over, with my papers, to a group of officers standing in the middle of a green field, the regiment I was with marching on towards the French frontier. I sat down, and, being on rising ground, had a good view of the roads, grey with marching columns, all proceeding towards the south. An officer, standing apart from the others, was delicately biting into a thin slice of black bread and lard, when another, detaching himself from the group, came up and said something to him. I heard him answer, "Sicher, sicher!" ("Certainly!"), whereupon he cut his slice with his penknife and gravely presented me with half. I as gravely bowed in the approved German fashion. An elderly officer then sat down and went through my papers, laughing now and then to himself as he read my notes, probably

at my adventures as a spy with the Belgian police. He then called a non-com. and started to dictate : prisoner, number so-and-so, caught at Froid-chapelle, etc. Then followed a list of papers and maps found on me. Catching my eye, he asked me in German if I understood the language, and on my answering, "Nein," he walked away out of earshot and went on. "Now he's faking up the case against me," thought I, and as he designated with his finger the railway embankment and a squad of soldiers who were standing by me, I thought my time had come. The non-com., however, soon put the papers in a big satchel and I was placed on the box-seat of a wagonette, in which sat the officer with my papers and another. Between them was piled officers' baggage, amongst which I saw a comical-looking case, evidently for a dress-helmet. From my place of vantage I had another opportunity of remarking the extraordinary pitch of organization of the column of which we formed part.

Behind and before me stretched the long road, which was one mass of supply and forage wagons, great carts full of corn, landaus and cars filled with officers and doctors, ambulance-wagons, hundreds of field-guns with their ammunition-wagons, whole trains of enormous pontoons dragged by six heavy horses, great traction-engines

drawing huge siege-guns covered with sailcloth. Every vehicle was painted the uniform grey, even those that were not service material. All advanced at a continuous walk ; should an obstruction occur the message to stop was carried backwards by the drivers making a pumping movement with the fist in the air. The signal to start was given by repeating the movement twice. Thus no time was lost, the whole column starting and stopping like a train. I noticed that every driver and service man carried a rifle, so that the great wagons simply bristled with guns. Some of the motor vans had chalked on their grey sides "Berlin-Paris." A bend or declivity in the road was shouted back, the order running along the column like musketry fire. Sometimes the order to keep to the right would come from behind to allow the passage of a motor-car full of officers, their faces caked with grey mud from the dust and sweat ; once an enormous grey omnibus came hurtling by, through the glass sides of which I saw Staff officers bending over maps.

A French aeroplane passed over our heads, evidently trying to spy out the strength of the column. The Germans ineffectually shelled it with shrapnel, the shells bursting like balls of thistledown below it. On either side of us in the fields Uhlans dashed about searching the countryside. Every-

where we passed we were still greeted by cries of "Der Engländer," as if I were a special prize, but I was by now too tired to mind, the continued jolting making me feel sleepy. Evening was now coming on, and we passed whole brigades of cavalry bivouacking, the horses tethered in rows like streets, the men digging holes for the camp fires. Regiments of infantry would drop out and invade a cornfield, which was soon flattened down ; some were already settling down for the night, soldiers hacking carcasses of cows and sheep under the last gleams of the setting sun, but still our group of vehicles pushed on. All over the country in the dusk of the on-coming night there gleamed the points of light from the camp fires. Coming at length into a deserted village, I heard the officer behind me telling an orderly to look out for a villa. We at length stopped before the open doors of the Mairie or village town hall, where I was told to get down. My legs were so stiff from the long ride after the march that at first I could scarcely walk.

Passing through the hall, littered with straw, I was escorted into what was evidently the magistrate's court, for the room was lined with legal books. In front of a high desk was a long, low table, at which sat an officer quietly writing by the light of two unshaded lamps ; the floor was one

litter of straw, broken cases, and empty wine-bottles, the night air coming in through the broken windows adding to the desolation. The officer went on writing, holding a cigarette between his fingers, and having my papers at his elbow, but he presently looked up and quizzingly asked me in good English what brought me there. I told him I had not come of my own free will nor for my pleasure, whereupon he said, "You have done something for yourselves, you English!" stared at me for a moment, and then returned to his writing. An orderly then brought me a deck chair, on which I sat down thankfully and observed the business, which was evidently that of preparing the orders for the morrow. An officer would come in, and after scribbling for a few minutes would call an orderly, who stood at attention like a statue whilst he listened to his orders. One clerk brought out a typewriter, others were up at the desk writing, whilst another stealthily brought in a dozen bottles of wine, the supplies for the night. An order was given, and two men brought in a great leather bag, like a trunk, which was full of bundles of detailed maps. They were turned out and compared, and the bundles were distributed to orderlies to be given to the officers for the following day's march.

No notice was taken of me, except that each

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new arrival took up the monotonous refrain of, "Ah, der Engländer !" This was soon changed, however, when in came a smart young officer, a captain of the General Staff, who to my intense relief accosted me with a "Good evening, Mr. La Barre," giving me his hand. He then asked me a few questions, and I told him about the effect of the shell fire in Namur, whereupon he informed me that the guns firing them had been perfected since the Balkan war to best the vaunted French artillery. He was much interested in my sketches, and told me he was sorry for the Belgians, who would have saved themselves all the damage to their country if they had allowed the Germans to pass through ; he was also sorry for the French, whom he liked, but was indignant at England's unexpected interference. He had lived in England and said we were a race more like themselves, and that Germany would never forgive us. He remarked that they had a fine navy which would give a good account of itself, but this was not said with the same confidence. I did not argue with him on the point, but managed to mention about the atrocities of their men ; he replied it was difficult to keep discipline. I had, however, seen the contrary in less important matters. I was told that the British had been defeated at Mons and 25,000 taken prisoners.

On his asking me what I would like to do, I said I should be glad to go on with my work as a war artist, but he pointed out that to do so I should have to apply through the proper channels, and that in any case I should not be able to see any battles. I then said I should like to return to Holland, but had been told all along the march that the Dutch were at war with England—this I subsequently found out was a case of the wish being father to the thought. He did not deceive me, but thought I should be allowed to cross the Dutch frontier. He would talk it over with his superiors, and would probably give me a pass on the morrow if I reported myself at eight. I could sleep in the Mairie, and orders had been given that I should be properly treated. I thanked him, and wished him good-night. That I had not seen any atrocities on the way beyond the ransacked houses I attribute to the fact that I had the luck to have fallen among the Guard, all picked men. For the same reason, and probably because I was a journalist and could influence public opinion, I was on the whole treated with kindness.

The suspense being over, I suddenly found I had a tremendous hunger, for I had not eaten all day, so I made signs to the soldiers for something to eat, and was told that the field

kitchen was not yet serving out. At length three separate soldiers brought me billycans full of great lumps of stewed beef and carrots; two of these, with a bottle of old claret and a lump of black bread, made an excellent supper. The kindly captain came in to see if I was being looked after and brought with his own hands a bottle of white Burgundy, which I emptied into my flask. I then turned in and slept in the straw in the open hall among the soldiers. I got up early next morning, and after a breakfast of hard black bread without butter and coffee like water, I wandered round and saw the damage done by the soldiery; all the doors were smashed open, the floors lay deep in straw, the crockery and ornaments were swept off the dressers and lay in heaps. Behind the town hall the courtyard was strewn with broken fowling-pieces, revolvers, and even old flintlocks and blunderbusses still bearing a label with the owner's name and address, which the trusting inhabitants had brought to the Burgomaster in obedience to the order posted up. I saw an officer hand over to the field post a fine old fowling-piece, with the address on a label dangling from a string.

Here and there were also some of the field-police in green uniforms, who looked very hard men indeed. A private told me that if a man left the trenches or the firing line it was their duty to shoot the delinquent.



FROIDCHAPELLE.



FUGITIVES.

"the lumbering wagons were piled up." (See page 84.)

The troops started off in the same way as on the previous day, followed by the guns and cavalry. Some of the men were running about ramming a last bottle of wine in their knapsacks or with a box of cigars under their arms. At length there only remained motor-cars, round which were grouped the Staff officers in their long grey coats. The clerks had packed their typewriter and had left on the now empty table a paper with the name of their regiment. At last the captain of the night before came in, wrote out a pass allowing me to regain Holland, and stamped it with the Imperial eagle. He said he was sorry no car was going in my direction, and asked me if I needed any money to take me on my way. I thanked him for his kind offer, but replied that I had enough to see me through. My tourist map of Belgium having been taken from me on the previous day, he cut his local military map in two and gave me the used up half, writing on the top, "Bitte Herrn La Barre diese Karte zu lassen." ("Please allow Mr. La Barre to keep this map.") I have suppressed the name of this officer, who acted towards me in every way as a gentleman, as he said he did not want his name to be mentioned. May he come through the campaign unscathed! Across the road soldiers were already repairing the telegraph wires, whilst a few others were still wandering

about the deserted houses looking for loot. One of the latter told me to take a bicycle that was propped up against a wall, and without waiting to be told twice I thankfully did so. I rode off to the town hall, and, after studying the map of Belgium there, I decided to make my way to Charleroi. Leaving Froidchapelle, I started off in a northerly direction and fell in with a young man who was cycling the same road. As he was dressed in rough shirt, trousers, and jacket, I was surprised when I discovered that he spoke in good English, and still more so when his Dutch and German turned out to be as good as his French. He told me that his parents had a large farm where they bred prize horses; when the fighting had approached his village his family had cleared out just as they were, harnessing a couple of the mares to their wagon and helping the villagers to flee. His one anxiety was for the prize brood mares and foals in the fields, and he was returning ahead of his family to reconnoitre. A mounted officer stopped us and roughly asked me my nationality; after looking at my German passport, all the while swearing horribly at me to hold his horse, he smiled sardonically, returned it, and shouted to me, "Bon voyage to England, and we shall be in London in a month!" I naturally made no audible answer to this, but murmured to myself, "I don't think!"

We next came across a stranded motor-car with officers aboard, who asked us, Browning in hand, if we understood anything about motor-engines ; we told them we didn't, but would go and look for somebody who did. We pushed on, and at last came in sight of my friend's village, Boussu-lez-Walcourt. We scanned the village through my binoculars, and great was my friend's joy on picking out his roof, which was intact. We passed cottages one mass of roaring flames, the cottagers dully looking on, holding their children by the hand. When we reached the farm we found the doors smashed open and the tables one filthy litter of cups and the remains of food, but otherwise the house was undamaged. The farmer had had the forethought to throw mattresses and old furniture to hide the passage to his wine-bins. Great jars of cream were still untouched as they had been left, but when we made a round of the farm it turned out that two of the horses were missing, besides many pigs and fowls. My friend seemed specially pleased that the petrol motor to work the churns was undamaged.

There was no food left in the house, so we lunched on some black bread which I had in my knapsack and which we spread thickly with cream. Through the open door we saw two grey-coats poking with their rifles about the house, and

presently they lounged in and asked if we had any petrol. They said they had been left behind to keep order in the village. An old woman of ninety-two was brought in trembling in every limb; she was an old servant and dependent of my friend's, and had had her cottage burned down because a few French soldiers had fired from behind it. After some time the farmer and his family returned with his wagon, which was full of nuns and children. After filling my water-bottle I left the farm and tried to find a quiet road, but they were all occupied with columns of marching Germans and baggage, which made it very difficult to go forward. The crowds of fugitives often stood still, blocking the road, and if one asked them the way they as often as not answered they did not belong to that part and were lost themselves. The lumbering wagons were piled up with goods rolled up in sheets, and on top were perched women and children; some of the men walked barefoot accompanied by women with their little ones clinging to their skirts, the old helpless grandmother perhaps being wheeled along in a barrow. The grey mass of army vehicles still went on, remorselessly waving the fugitives aside; not a road could be found free of them. When officers passed by the peasants would humbly raise their caps to the invaders.

On reaching the town of Walcourt I found the straggling square one heap of ruins ; a great church, standing at one end, was completely gutted by shells, which had set it on fire. The nave of the church was open to the sky, great brass candelabra and religious pictures were strewn about, whilst high-backed chairs were still standing in rows like people kneeling among the wreckage. The top of a lofty tower was burned away, with great ribbons of metal-work hanging from its blackened sides. A woman was sweeping the steps with a handbrush in the still intact porch, mechanically going on with her duties, without having as yet grasped the meaning of the smouldering ruins round her. The gutters were full of empty wine-bottles ; those houses which were not burned down had their doors smashed in, even the banks and public buildings having been ransacked. I noticed some of the fugitives grubbing about the bottles trying to find something to drink.

Leaving Walcourt, through which still passed the massed columns, I at length found a road free of them, but dotted here and there with groups patiently trudging along. Sometimes I would pass, pinching my nose with my fingers, the body of a horse blown up with putrefying gases, fields of trampled corn strewn with tins and ashes, showing where the troops had bivouacked. The

skeletons of bullocks, with the unflayed head still attached and heaps of intestines and hides, stood out gruesomely ; farther on some peasants were digging a shallow trench near a dead horse. Along the side of the road in the open fields stood long little mounds, surmounted by two sticks in the form of a cross, on which was stuck a piece of paper with a number on it, the unstable record of the last resting-place of some son or father. After passing more burned villages, I was now well on the main road to Charleroi, free from troops, but still strewn with a trail of dead horses. I then traversed the industrial outskirts and arrived in the town dead tired.

Whilst having some supper in a quiet little hotel I was told that the town had been bombarded and that the Germans had set fire to all the fine houses for the whole length of the Boulevard d'Audent, the pride of this manufacturing centre. A young man, the son of the hotelier, said they set fire to the houses, waited for the people to come out and shot them. Many who had taken refuge from the bombardment in the cellars were burned alive. He and a young friend were breaking a grating to let some people escape from such a burning house when his friend was shot, and died a few minutes afterwards. The priests and the mayor of the town were placed in the

square the whole day with their hands tied behind their backs, and threatened with death if a shot was fired by an inhabitant. A number of soldiers came into a room where a mother was lying sick, tended by her daughter ; they formed themselves into two parties and outraged them before each other's eyes. They spoke about these things in whispers, stopping when they heard a step outside. Fear and hate were still painted on their faces as they cowered under the heel of the invader.

A gentleman came in, wearing on his arm the "brassard" or armlet of the police. They had been impressed to do duty in arresting any one who might be found in the ruins of the houses. He unpinned his band of office and put it in his pocket, with a sigh, as he said, "Now I'm no longer a police-officer." After assuring himself that the door was shut, he joined in the conversation, and said he had seen things which he durst not tell even to people he knew. Then he burst into tears as he recounted that he had been to bury his bosom friend who had been shot for not telling the soldiers where his money lay hidden. The man had begged on his knees for his wife and child to be spared, but they shot them before his eyes.

Next morning I went with the hotelier's son and saw the burned-down houses on the boulevard,

which, stretching for a quarter of a mile in a long perspective of heaped-up bricks and beams, looked like the bed of a dried-up river. Many of the streets were impassable owing to the danger of falling masonry. We talked with shopkeepers who had lost all their goods and were penniless. I tried to get a photograph of the damage, but it had been strictly forbidden by the German authorities. I shouldered my knapsack and tried to find my way to Brussels, but the main roads were again infested with marching columns. I asked one of the temporary policemen my way, but he told me to make off as quickly as possible, as I was standing in front of the building where the Etat Major was, and they might requisition my bicycle. I came to a bridge over the railway, with the houses near by a tumble-down heap of ruins. This was at the entrance of the town on a road which led to Brussels and along which were the mining suburbs of Jumet and Lodelinsart. I was told that this long road was crammed with a German column when some fifteen French soldiers, who had remained behind in some houses with a few machine-guns had opened fire with terrible effect on the head of the column ; the whole came to a standstill, whistles blew, the soldiers jumped off from the wagons and set fire to all the houses lining the road with some material they carry specially for

the purpose. For three miles as far as Gosselies I passed along an alley of smouldering, gutted houses. At Gosselies traction-engines were pulling along enormous siege-guns of which the Germans were so proud, but, without stopping, I went on until I reached the cornfields of the plains of Waterloo.

I here met a Belgian workman who was cycling towards Brussels ; he had been down to see the sights, as he said. We joined company and pushed on without meeting any more Germans. A shower having fallen and the sun having come out, we sat down on the dewy bank, and I shared my lunch and the wine I had in my flask with him. The bicycle given me by the Germans was a good light one, but had those ridiculous drop-handle-bars, so that I had not much control over it unless I kept my nose on the handle-bar, and in this position my knapsack crept up and made me very uncomfortable. My travelling companion suggested that we should change mounts for the journey, which we did, his bicycle being heavier and not so easy running, although more comfortable with my load and the straight handle-bar.

We arrived in Nivelles without any accident ; there were no armed Germans, only a few wounded soldiers walking about. A few motors were bringing the less seriously wounded men from the

hospitals nearer the front to the interior, so as to relieve the pressure and to make room for the more serious cases who could not be moved. I admired *en passant* the ancient church, a fine example of early Gothic, which overlooks the quiet square ; on one side of the tower on a projecting platform stood a great gilt figure, dressed in the costume of the Middle Ages, the famous Jean de Nivelles.

I treated my companion to a glass of beer at one of the little tables on the pavement in front of the café, and was paying the waiter when the workman decamped with my bicycle ! I could not catch him up with the load on my back, so gave it up in disgust. In spite of all the horrors and trials I had been through, this is what rankled most in my mind, for I had treated the fellow well. I pedalled on, however, along the now level road to Brussels, and came across workmen at the cross-roads erecting sentry-boxes connected up by telephone, the idea being, I presume, to hold as much country as possible with few men. Motors containing wounded French and Germans still passed me going towards the city, where I arrived late in the evening and noted the changed aspect of the people.

The cheerful enthusiasm was gone, the people listlessly strolling along the boulevards, glancing

with covert disdain at the few perky Germans strutting about with their rifles always ready. No more motors or boy scouts dashing about, all was still but for a restricted service of tramcars, and should a German soldier board one of these the subdued talk of the passengers fell to a dead silence. A few Belgian flags still bravely hung out. I had promised myself a good dinner after the four days' hard fare, so went and sat down in a restaurant and ordered the menu in pleasant anticipation. I was informed that it was now on the stroke of nine, and at that time all hotels and cafés had to be closed, so I had to go without my dinner. I went out into the street, but everything was remorselessly closed; seeing a light, I stepped out towards it, and it turned out to be a *charcuterie*, where they served me with some ham. On asking for some bread I was given a piece of grey brick filled with a few big holes, less palatable than the soldiers' bread, and was told that it was due to their having to bake it themselves and using beer instead of yeast, of which there was a dearth.

After some seeking I found lodgings, and the next morning was glad to have my week's beard shaved off and a good breakfast in a restaurant. The cafés where the German officers sat seemed to be shunned. Before the Gare du Nord two

mitrailleuses were placed, pointing across the square, and attended by a squad of soldiers sitting on chairs—one of the German methods of intimidation. In shop windows German official placards informed the populace that the English troops had been annihilated, the French put to rout, and that the German fleet had sunk six English battleships ! The rumour still persisted that Holland was at war with England and allied with Germany, evidently with the idea of impressing the population with the hopelessness of their position.

Whilst having my breakfast, a gentleman came up and asked me if I wanted to go back to England. I told him yes, if I could. He explained that he was a Belgian but had lived many years in England, whither he wished to return as he was a horse-trainer. We discussed ways and means of leaving Brussels, but everybody said it was quite impossible to do so ; I had, however, learned to take no notice of such-like rumours since I had been in Belgium. We haggled with a cab-driver, and finally he agreed to take us to Alost at an exorbitant price, so we put my bicycle in the carriage, and we arrived at Alost railway-station without having been stopped once or meeting a single German soldier. We were glad to find trains still running, and booked to Ostend.

From Alost to our destination we were on territory occupied neither by German nor Allied troops. At Ghent we were told the train did not proceed farther, but the passengers all trooped into the stationmaster's office and protested. This had the effect of deciding him to make up a train, and we arrived at Ostend at sunset. I felt like cheering when I saw the chain of British warships riding at anchor.

Settling down to the peaceful atmosphere of the seaside, I found, now that the tension of being in the enemy's country was relaxed, that I was troubled with nerves. I had got accustomed to the sound of cannon at Namur, and could stand coolly when the shrapnel was raining, braced up by seeing others facing the danger. But when a motor exhaust exploded near me I involuntarily ducked! I had slept soundly to the booming concert of the guns, but here slept lightly, and woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of marching. I went to the window and took the harbour lights for camp fires and the marching for a German column! It was our Marines stealthily marching, and I was in Ostend!

Next morning my friend had news which made it unnecessary for him to go to England, but he kindly went to book a berth for me whilst I went into town on my bicycle to make a few purchases.

A cyclist in front of me was stopped by a policeman, and, thinking I was infringing some rule of the road, I got off ; my bicycle was immediately taken along with the other to the police-station ! They were being gathered like whelks on the beach, the police simply trooping in with their captures. They were being requisitioned for our handy-men to make their way quickly to the front. I was given a receipt and told I could have my machine back after the war ! I laughingly replied that they were welcome to it, as it was a legacy, and hurried off to catch the boat, getting on board just as they were pulling up the plank. The decks were crowded with women and children, who, with tears in their eyes, waved an adieu to their country. They cheered when they passed our ships, and cheered again when they caught a first glimpse of the white cliffs of old England.

We soon got through the Customs, who did not worry us much as to contraband ; indeed, their only question was, " Any newspapers ? " This was no doubt a necessary precaution to prevent the enemy getting news of important movements which were being carried on in Belgium, and which at the time of writing—September 12th—are beginning to be revealed. Once installed before a good English dinner in a London hotel, after all the horrors I had seen, I was struck with what

seemed to me the unconcern (or was it lack of imagination rather?) of the people surrounding me. The ladies were dining in *décolleté* or strolling about in wraps ; an old dandified gentleman was coolly puffing at his cigar as if nothing out of the way was happening in the world ; a prim lady at the next table was quietly reproving her daughter for some trifling breach of table etiquette, whilst the subdued strains of a hidden orchestra breathed an air of gentle languor and grace. I involuntarily wondered what would happen if a German shell came hurtling through the roof of the hotel ! I admit that my reflections were somewhat unjust at first, for I should have remembered that England has for centuries never come in close personal contact with war and its cruelties ; our emotions and fears have all been, as it were, at second hand, protected as we are from the assault of foes by that strip of heaving water out yonder. As I sat sipping my coffee and smoking a cigarette my thoughts turned back to brave little Belgium, the land of my birth, that had dared to throw its puny weight against the mighty onslaught of the ruthless German hordes and was now suffering an agony such as few in England can imagine. There arose in my mind the dreadful vision of smoking homesteads, crumbling churches, ruined cottages, and

devastated cornfields where once had been a smiling, prosperous country-side, the pride of an enlightened and industrious people. My ears still rang with the cries of the homeless children, wandering weary and dry-eyed amidst the smouldering villages, and the moaning of the women, who had faced not merely the pangs of death but unspeakable shame at the hands of the invader. And let us not forget that that great sacrifice was not made only to preserve the liberties of Belgium and the traditions of a free people. No, Belgium bore the brunt of the blow to save the fair land of France and to keep inviolate the shores of England. If the German rush had not been stemmed at Liège, the whole coastline from Ostend to Havre would have been in the hands of the enemy, and the rank stench of battle and death would have been borne on the wind to the gates of London. Let us do our utmost to heal the gaping wounds of Belgium and to comfort her refugees that have fled to our hospitality. Charleroi, Termonde, Aerschot, and Louvain cry aloud for vengeance, and in that stern hour of retribution that now seems to confront the German hosts may there be no wavering on the part of the Allies to exact the uttermost penalty!

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